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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Date: January 10, 2008

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EEA's Coastal Zone Management Office Receives \$1 Million Grant to Restore Coastal Habitat in Plymouth

*Funding will help restore 40 acres of wetlands and over a mile of waterways
in Eel River Headwaters*

BOSTON – Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Ian Bowles today announced that EEA's Office of Coastal Zone Management has received a \$1 million Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant to help the town of Plymouth repair degraded aquatic habitats within the town-owned Eel River Headwaters conservation area. Combined with other partner funding, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) grant will restore approximately one mile of the Eel River Headwaters and nearly 40 acres of adjacent wetlands damaged by previous agricultural operations.

The grant includes \$38,500 for the town to purchase the Hayden Pond property in Plymouth, a 13.6-acre proposed conservation parcel that abuts the Eel River, contains 800 feet of river frontage, and supports a spawning run of alewife and blueback herring. This purchase will link several open space parcels into a contiguous 1,000-acre tract of protected conservation land within the town.

"I am pleased to announce this grant to be used by the town of Plymouth, our CZM office, and other partners to restore this exemplary wetland and river system," Secretary Bowles said. "By providing vision and leadership for numerous open space and restoration projects, the town of Plymouth continues to set a strong example of municipal action to protect the environment. With ambitious projects such as the Eel River, Plymouth has had extraordinary success in pulling

together diverse partners and funding sources for projects that benefit the community, the environment, and the region.”

"The Fish and Wildlife Service is extremely excited to be working with the Massachusetts Wetlands Restoration Program, the town of Plymouth, and other conservation partners on this groundbreaking restoration and habitat protection effort. These organizations have a very successful track record in completing challenging projects, and this grant will result in the restoration of important and rare natural coastal communities for fish and wildlife," said Wendi Weber, Deputy Regional Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Eel River Headwaters Restoration Project is co-led by the town of Plymouth and state restoration programs, and supported by a strong partnership of local, state, federal, private, and non-governmental organizations. In addition to the town and CZM's Wetlands Restoration Program, project partners include the Massachusetts Department of Fish & Game's Riverways Program, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, USFWS, US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, American Rivers, The Nature Conservancy, Massachusetts Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership, and Eel River Watershed Association.

"The Eel River Headwaters project exemplifies the impressive progress that can be achieved when diverse partners join together to reverse the environmental damage of the past for the benefit of local communities and future generations," said CZM Director Leslie-Ann McGee. "The public-private partnership supporting this project in Plymouth is exactly the type of coalition that is needed to successfully complete these challenging restoration efforts – and we at CZM are proud to help our partners achieve their goals."

Through its Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, USFWS provides matching grants to states for acquisition, restoration, management, or enhancement of coastal wetlands and conservation land. The town of Plymouth is the primary partner on the grant, which will be administered by CZM. Under grant program rules, only state agencies are eligible to receive grant awards and applicants must provide a 50 percent match unless the state has an established fund for coastal land protection. Because Massachusetts has a Self Help Program to assist towns with conservation land purchases, the match requirement for this grant was reduced to 25 percent.

"The success in securing this funding is a tribute to the hard work of Plymouth town officials, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, the Eel River Watershed Association and so many other organizations that share a passion for preserving our open space and wetlands," said Congressman William Delahunt. "Without their dedicated efforts, this grant would not have come to fruition."

"The Eel River ecosystem is as important to Plymouth's future as it is to our history," Senate President Therese Murray said. "This project and the dedication of the community, state, and private organizations to see this project through are incredible. With that commitment and this funding, we will be able to make great strides in the restoration of an ecosystem that is critical to our community and our state."

“America’s hometown has once again demonstrated the extraordinary progress that can be made through public/private partnerships,” added Representative Tom Calter. “This grant will provide the resources needed to restore a significant portion of the Eel River Headwaters and adjacent wetlands. I remain proud of the town of Plymouth for its leadership on important environmental issues.”

Plymouth’s Environmental Manager David Gould said, “The town of Plymouth is pleased to be the leader in this important precedent-setting ecological restoration project. The Eel River Headwaters Restoration project would not have come together without the close collaboration with state agencies such as Coastal Zone Management and Riverways Program on technical as well as funding aspects of the project. The town is excited to have the opportunity to implement this valuable project and we hope it will be a model for other communities.”

Among the newly-funded project’s major objectives is comprehensive restoration of the entire Eel River Headwaters system to benefit all native species that depend on the habitat. The project will recreate a dynamically stable river channel with coldwater habitat, and restore nearly 40 acres of former, abandoned cranberry bogs back to native wetland types. The restored river and wetlands will promote high ecological diversity and bring back valuable natural community types, including Atlantic white cedar bog habitat - designated by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program as a rare and vulnerable wetland type.

“Massachusetts is proving to be a leader with truly effective restoration projects for rivers and wetlands,” said Brian Graber, Associate Director of American Rivers’ Greater Northeast Office. “What makes the Eel River project so exciting is that we are restoring an entire ecosystem for everything from trout to Atlantic white cedar, as well as making improvements to public infrastructure and providing an amenity for the community. This project is serving as a model for collaborative, holistic habitat restoration for the entire region.”

"The town of Plymouth and the Massachusetts Wetlands Restoration Program deserve a lot of credit for their leadership on great restoration projects like this one. TNC is pleased that restoration is moving forward on property that we helped the town acquire," said Loring Schwarz, Acting Massachusetts State Director for The Nature Conservancy.

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